

Third Letter to Henry Bullinger

Lady Jane Grey

Anglican · Reformation · Letter

STROMATA 10

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INTRODUCTION

Written from England to the Zürich reformer Heinrich Bullinger by a teenaged noblewoman who would, within months of her execution at sixteen, become Protestantism's most famous English martyr, this letter belongs to a small correspondence Jane Grey maintained with the Swiss divines during the final years of Edward VI's reign. The letter shows her not as the tragic figure of the Nine Days' Queen, but as a serious student of Reformed theology cultivating her own intellectual fathers across the Channel. Readers will find a young woman's formal Latinate courtesy laid over genuine theological apprenticeship, closer to a disciple's report than to private correspondence, and best read slowly for what it reveals of a mind being shaped for the trial it did not yet know was coming.

The late observance of a duty ought not, Learned Sir, to be censured, when not omitted through neglect. The truth is, I am far removed from you, the letter carriers are few, and news reaches me slowly. As I can now, however, avail myself of the messenger, by whom my letters to you, and yours to me, have been hitherto conveyed, I must not neglect writing to you, but must, both in word and deed, discharge an obligation as speedily as possible.

So great, indeed, is your authority with all men, such, as I hear, the solidity of your preaching, and such the integrity of your life, according to the report of those who are acquainted with you, that foreign and remote people, as well as your own countrymen, are by your actions, not less than by your words, incited to follow a good and happy life. For you are not only, as James says, a diligent preacher and herald of the gospel and of the sacred laws of God, but also a genuine observer and doer of them; and you exhibit, in your own life that practice which your precepts enjoin, not deceiving yourself. Nor, indeed, do you resemble the persons who behold their face in a glass, and as soon as they have departed, forget the form of it, but you preach truth and sincerity, and afford an example of that course, which you enjoin others to follow. But why do I thus accost your gravity, when such is my want of refinement, that I cannot adequately celebrate your piety and integrity, or in a becoming manner, display your admirable doctrine. Were I, indeed, to praise you as truth requires, I should need the eloquence of Demosthenes and Cicero. Such are your merits, that to declare them, length of time, acuteness of understanding, and elegance of language beyond that which so young a person can display, are necessary. God appears to have so fitted you, both for his kingdom, and this world, that in this earthly prison you pass your days,

as dead to the world; nevertheless you live, not only to Christ, without whom there can be no life, and to yourself, but also to many others, whom you strenuously labour and assiduously endeavour with the divine will, to bring to that immortality which yourself will obtain, when you quit this life. That your piety may render your wishes effectual, is my unceasing prayer to God, the supreme ruler of the universe, and the giver of all good things; whose ears I constantly importune for your long continuance in this life.

In accosting you in this way, I may display more boldness than prudence; but so great has been your condescension in writing to me, a stranger, and in supplying me with instruction for the culture and adorning of my mind, that I should deservedly appear chargeable with neglect and forgetfulness of duty, did I not, to the utmost of my endeavours, treasure up the remembrance of your benefits. Besides, I cherish the hope that you will pardon the more than feminine boldness of an untaught virgin, who presumes to write to a man, and one too who is a father in learning; and that you will overlook that rudeness which has not hesitated to interrupt your graver pursuits with nonsensical trifles and puerilities. Let me but obtain your pardon, and I shall consider myself much indebted to your goodness on many accounts. If I have, indeed, offended by this measure, ascribe rather to my exceeding love of you and of your virtues, than to boldness, which ought never to exist in our sex, or to rashness, which obtrudes itself with a saw like power. The splendour of your endowments so dazzles my mental perception, whether I read your writings or contemplate your character, that my thoughts are occupied in considering, not the behaviour becoming my condition, but the tribute due to your excellence. My mind, indeed, fluctuates and forms different determinations. When I consider my age, sex, moderate attainments in literature, and I may add, my infancy, I am deterred from writing; but when I consider the eminence of your virtues, the celebrity of your character, and the magnitude of your favours towards me, the first consideration yields to the last — the behaviour becoming me, to the tribute due to you; the respect which your merits demand, prevails over all other considerations. It only remains for me earnestly to beseech you, illustrious Sir, cordially to salute in my name, the excellent Bibliander, that pattern of learning, piety, and seriousness, though he is personally unknown to me. So excellent is the character which he bears in my own country, and so celebrated his name with all people, that I am irresistibly led to seek an acquaintance with a man of such piety and integrity, a man sent us, if I am not deceived, from heaven. I am also urged to pray, that as pillars of the Church you may enjoy good health. As long as I shall be permitted to live, I shall not cease to be your well-wisher, to thank you for your favours, and to pray for your welfare.

Farewell, Learned Sir,

Your most religiously obedient,

Jane Grey. 1553.

Source: <https://archive.org/details/memoirsremainsof00grey/page/5/mode/2up>

These texts are drawn from *Memoirs and Remains of Lady Jane Grey*, a compilation of her letters, prayers, disputations, and scaffold writings. The Internet Archive copy used here is available at <https://archive.org/details/memoirsremainsof00grey>. The compilation was

first published in the nineteenth century; the letters to Bullinger were originally in Latin and appear here in English translation (translator unattributed in this edition). The translations are themselves pre-1900 and are public domain. Original spelling has been lightly modernised in places by the nineteenth-century editors; the texts are otherwise presented as found. No independent transcription has been made against manuscript sources.

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